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Southwest Iowa Regents Resource Center  
Tri-State Graduate Center



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June 16, 2006

The Hon. Dwayne Alons  
State Representative  
Chair  
House Govt. Oversight Comm.  
1314 7<sup>th</sup> Street  
Hull, IA 51239

The Hon. Thomas Courtney  
State Senator  
Co-Chair  
Senate Govt. Oversight Comm.  
2200 Summer St.  
Burlington, IA 52601

The Hon. Ron Wieck  
State Senator  
Co-Chair  
Senate Govt. Oversight Comm.  
4362 Old Lakeport Rd.  
Sioux City, IA 51103

Dear Representative Alons and Senators Courtney and Wieck:

I write to respond to the concerns identified by Mr. Robert Marqusee, Director of the Department of Rural Economic Development in Woodbury County, regarding the feasibility study conducted by the Board of Regents in Fall 2005 in response to House File 868.

House File 868 directed the Board of Regents "to conduct a study to determine the feasibility of establishing a graduate school in western Iowa in cooperation with other public or private institutions of higher learning. By December 15, 2005, the board shall submit a report to the general assembly and the governor regarding the findings and recommendations of the study."

I shall respond point by point to Mr. Marqusee's outline:

- 1a. Subject of Feasibility Study – "Did not do a feasibility study." The primary objectives of the study conducted by the Board of Regents were (1) to determine if there were significant unmet needs for graduate education in western Iowa; and (2) to consider the possibility of addressing unmet graduate educational needs through the establishment of a new graduate school in western Iowa separate from the graduate centers that currently exist in western Iowa.
- 1b. Collaboration Requirements – "Never consulted with other public and private institutions." If unmet educational needs had been identified and the Board of Regents had determined that there was a need for a new graduate school in western Iowa, the Board would have directed the Regent universities to enter into collaboration discussions with other post-secondary institutions. The Regent universities will follow closely the establishment of a college campus in South Sioux City by Wayne State College and Northeast Community College. As educational needs are identified, the Regent universities will investigate the possibility of offering classes at this campus.
- 1c. Economic Development Focus – "No economic development data." The Board of Regents supports economic development in Woodbury County by providing educational offerings to address unmet educational needs.
2. Regents' Stated Basis for Report is Misleading and Incomplete. The study team contacted all parties that had a direct bearing on meeting the requirements of HF 868.

3. Support for Establishment of a Graduate School in western Iowa. While the Board of Regents is appreciative of Woodbury County's offer to "work to acquire all real property for present and planned future needs of the university," the Board cannot overlook the need for ongoing financial support to operate such a university. At the present time, the universities are underfunded for faculty salaries and the Board is contemplating a temporary surcharge. Without additional state appropriations for a new school, it would be unconscionable for the Board to divert funds from the existing institutions, especially in light of the fact that there are no unmet educational needs.
4. Need for Establishment of Graduate School in Woodbury County, Iowa. To determine unmet needs for graduate education in western Iowa, an inter-institutional team consisting of Regent university and Board Office representatives identified and reviewed the current programmatic offerings in western Iowa, offered through the Tri-State Graduate Center in Sioux City and the Southwest Iowa Regents Resource Center in Council Bluffs. The Regent universities regularly survey constituencies in both areas regarding emerging needs for post-secondary and graduate education. Programs are regularly introduced or modified to meet such needs.
  - ◇ The Regent universities offer two Ph.D. programs, 27 master's programs, and 15 graduate certificate programs through the Southwest Iowa Regents Resource Center using a variety of media, including the ICN, Iowa Public Television, guided independent study, face-to-face, and the Web. A study conducted in FY 2002 concluded that, although enrollment in many of the programs offered at the Center was minimal, the Regent universities were meeting the need for graduate education in the Council Bluffs area that would otherwise be unmet. During 2004-05, 530 Regent students were served through the Center.
  - ◇ The Regent universities offer two Ph.D. programs, 51 master's programs, and 11 graduate certificate programs through the Tri-State Graduate Center using a variety of media, including the ICN, Iowa Public Television, guided independent study, face-to-face, and the Web. While the enrollment at the Tri-State Graduate Center has been marginal in some programs, the Regent universities are providing important offerings to help meet the expressed graduate education needs of northwest Iowa. During 2004-05, 342 Regent students were served through the Center. Furthermore, there are 12 other four-year institutions providing a total of 48 graduate programs and certificates through the Tri-State Graduate Center.

The team attempted to identify significant unmet needs for graduate education in western Iowa by reviewing recent marketing and needs assessment results. During a six-week period in early Fall 2005, 97 ads were run by the Regent universities in Sioux City from early morning to late evening. A toll-free number was included in the ad for interested persons to contact the University of Iowa's Center for Credit Programs. A total of four phone calls were received in response to the ads, three of which were relevant.

Using the results of all available studies, the team determined that, currently, no new unmet needs for specific graduate programs in western Iowa have been identified and, therefore, there is no need for a new graduate school in western Iowa. The most feasible way to provide sustainable graduate programs in western Iowa is through the existing centers in Council Bluffs and Sioux City. While the enrollment in many programs offered by the centers is marginally sustainable, the Regent universities have made a commitment to providing these programs at the centers because they are able to achieve some resource efficiencies. The programs delivered through the centers will be expanded to address specific unmet needs for graduate education as those needs arise. A new center in western Iowa would be cost-prohibitive and would likely not expand the level of offerings currently available.

5. Request for a Real Feasibility Study to be Undertaken Pursuant to Legislation. The Board of Regents concluded that the feasibility study conducted by the team met the requirements of HF 868. The Board is prepared to undertake any additional studies mandated by the general assembly.

Sincerely,

Michael Gartner

cc: The Honorable Clel Baudler  
The Honorable Michael Connolly  
The Honorable George Eichhorn  
The Honorable Joe Hutter  
The Honorable Vicki Lensing  
The Honorable Roger Thomas  
The Honorable James Van Fossen  
The Honorable Pat Ward  
The Honorable Wesley Whitead  
The Honorable Cindy Winckler  
Sam Leto  
Douglas Wulf  
Rick Nelson  
Bruce Brandt  
Jenifer Parsons  
Carolann Jensen  
Steve Conway  
Legislative Liaisons  
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Mary Shipman